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Intelligence—III

Errors in Collecting Data Held Exceeded by Evaluation Weakness

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

Several intelligence fiascos since the war, major service differences in our estimates of Russian strength and intelligence evaluations too much influenced by prejudice have hampered and are still hampering a sound intelligence analysis of the world situation.

The fiascos—they might be called intelligence "catastrophies"—have occurred in Rumania, Hungary, Finland and elsewhere.

The Rumanian case of last fall offered an almost opera bouffe example of how intelligence should not be gathered; the episode might well have been "graustarkian" had it not resulted in tragedy and in considerable embarrassment to the United States Government.

Two young and exuberant army officers attached to the Central Intelligence Agency as carry-overs from the old Office of Strategic Services organization made contacts almost openly with anti-Communist and opposition leaders in Rumania, urged the formation of an anti-Communist group in that country and recorded their efforts, the names of the conspirators and even the minutes of the "secret" meetings held—apparently in order to impress their superiors with their industry.

"Duck Soup" for Soviet MVD

Naturally such naive attempts were "duck soup" for the Russian MVD; the officers left Rumania hastily, but their native associates soon landed in jail. The Russians utilized the information, including the seized documents, with considerable embarrassment to this Government at the trial of Dr. Juliu Maniu and his associates which subsequently resulted in Dr. Maniu's imprisonment for life.

The details of the Hungarian and Finnish fiascos have understandably been guarded with considerable secrecy, but apparently "rings" of agents established in the old OSS days and inherited willy-nilly by the Central Intelligence Agency were responsible for much loose work which resulted in easy detection and ultimate elimination of the "rings."

Perhaps more dangerous today than the heritage of the mistakes of the past, and even more glaringly weak than our system of collection of intelligence, is our evaluation of it. That evaluation is too often subjective and prejudiced, and is too often made by men without adequate background for the task.

Each service—Army G-2, Air Force A-2, Navy-ONI—is making subjective estimates of Russian strength, each of which varies in important particulars from the other estimates. The Navy emphasizes Russian submarine strength; the Air Force, Russian air power; the Army, numbers of Russian divisions.

Each service's estimates are, of course, affected, if only subconsciously, by the inter-service struggle for funds and by their own service loyalties and service interests. The men who are making these estimates are thinking first as naval officers, air officers or Army officers, not as intelligence officers.

The result is a distorted picture of Russian strength. The Navy probably exaggerates the numbers of modern Russian submarines; the Air Force's estimates of Russian combat planes are not wholly accepted by G-2, and at least one well informed British air officer believes the A-2 estimate of Russian long-range bombers is far too high.

CIA Tries to Reconcile Data

The CIA is attempting to reconcile these divergent estimates with the aid of service information and its own sources, and the resultant compromise estimate is, in this writer's opinion, more accurate—or at least, less in error—than that of any one of the services. Yet the CIA estimate cannot yet command the respect it must have, if it is to mean much, partly because of past CIA mistakes, partly because of some inferior CIA personnel, partly because of the newness of the CIA and its history of frictions and duplications.

Another mistake now currently being made—exemplified in the February and March crisis when the CIA was right but General Clay and the Army were wrong—was a mistake constantly made during wartime, the confusion of enemy "capabilities" with enemy "intentions." The Russians, for instance, may have the physical "capability" of overrunning western Europe in forty-five days—though this seems a dubious estimate—and the military services may be perfectly correct in so estimating, for this involves a military judgment. But a Russian "intention" to overrun western Europe must imply political as well as military judgment, and the services are not particularly competent to make such judgments.

This is the function of the CIA, to couple the political judgments of the State Department with the military judgments of the services and to supplement them with data gathered by itself and other Government agencies and to evaluate all this and present a definitive whole view. Too often it has not done this, at least not comprehensively; too often it has simply repeated the political views of state and the military views of the services.

Occasionally it has produced a careful synthesis, and it has certainly produced many detailed reports of great value. Its judgment in the so-called "spring crisis," for instance, was far closer to being correct than the Army's was.

But the CIA does not yet have sufficient stature to command the full confidence of the other services. Nor can the other intelligence services—subjective in their approach—fulfill alone the functions which CIA is supposed to fill.